

SUBJECT AND VERB AGREEMENT

REMEMBER: Nouns ending in *-s* or *-es* are usually plural. **HOWEVER**, regular verbs ending in *-s*, unlike nouns, are usually singular. **TYPICALLY**, plural subjects ending in *-s* or *-es* require a verb which does not end in *-s*.

PRONOUNS 1st (I) & 2nd (you) person singular *do not* take verbs which end in *-s* or *-es*; 3rd person singular *does* take a verb ending in *-s* or *-es*. Following is a list of rules and examples to help guide you through

RULE 1:

Verbs agree with their subjects in number (Singular or Plural)

- Singular subjects take singular verbs.
 - The boy swims at the lake.
 - The dog barks at night.
- Plural subjects take plural verbs.
 - The boys swim at the lake.
 - The dogs bark at night.

Note: Do not change the subject to agree with the verb. Change the verb to agree with the subject.

RULE 2:

Phrases which come between the subject and the verb *usually* have nothing to do with whether a subject is singular or plural.

Examples:

- The girls on the cheerleading squad cheer for the football players.
 - Eliminate *on the cheerleading squad* and you're left with *girls . . . cheer*.
- The patterns on the plate are perfect roses.
 - Eliminate *on the plate* and you're left with *patterns . . . are*.
- The boys, as well as the girls, eat ice cream.
 - Eliminate *as well as the girls* and you're left with *boys . . . eat*.
- Taxes, when added to the price, make the car too expensive for me.
 - Eliminate *when added to the price* and you're left with *Taxes . . . make*.

All you need to know about the above examples is that there is a plural subject which requires a plural verb in each sentence. Ask yourself *WHO* or *WHAT* (noun or pronoun) is doing some thing, and *WHAT* is he doing (verb) or *WHAT* is he (adjective). *He talks. I am.*

Don't worry about knowing what is going on in the sentence when you are looking for subject/verb agreement.

IGNORE prepositional phrases or expressions enclosed by commas which may come between the subject and verb. Find only Subjects and Verbs.

RULE 3:

The indefinite pronouns—each, every, either, neither, one, each and every—are singular. The indefinite pronouns which end in *-one, -body, -thing* are singular: (anyone, everyone, someone; anything, everything, something, nothing; anybody, everybody, somebody, nobody).

- Everyone has his or her own bicycle.
- Nobody goes to the swimming pool on Saturday.
- Each of the books is well-written.
- Every one of the students is able to pass this test.
- One of the roads leads to nowhere.

(Remember: The word *every* by itself is not a pronoun, but *everyone* is.)

RULE 4:

The pronouns—several, few, both, and many—are plural. (Ignore the prepositional phrase which follows the pronoun.)

Examples:

- Several of the desserts look tasty.
 - Eliminate *of the desserts* and you're left with *Several . . . look*.
- Few of the presents are practical.
 - Eliminate *of the presents* and you're left with *Few . . . are*.
- Both of us are planning to be there.
 - Eliminate *of us* and you're left with *Both . . . are*.
- Many of the workers take their vacations in August.
 - Eliminate *of the workers* and you're left with *Many . . . take*.

RULE 5:

The pronouns—some, any, none, all, a lot, and most—may be singular or plural, depending on the meaning of the sentence.

Note: These words are usually followed by a prepositional phrase which indicates whether the subject is singular or plural. Try this trick: Place your thumb over the pronoun and the preposition and make the noun or pronoun which follows agree with the verb. In other words, **DO NOT IGNORE the prepositional phrase.**

Examples:

- Some of the cake has been eaten. (singular)
- Some of the animals are kept in a pen. (plural)
- Any of the workers assist customers regularly. (plural)
- None of the book makes sense. (singular)
- All of the cousins like the party plans. (plural)
- All of the fruit has ripened today. (singular)
- Most of the presents have been returned. (plural)
- Most of the house is under water. (singular)

Treat the sentences as if *some of, any of, none of, all of, and most of* are not there. Thus, you are left with

- *the cake has . . .*
- *the animals are . . .*
- *the workers assist . . .*
- *the book makes . . .*

- *the cousins like . . .*
- *the fruit has . . .*
- *the presents have . . .*
- *the house is . . .*

RULE 6:

Subjects joined by *and* always take a plural verb (EXCEPT when *each and every* precedes the words).

Examples:

- The boys and the girls enjoy ice cream.
- The dogs and the cat sleep on the porch.
- The birds and the bees are flying in the yard.
- Each and every boy and girl is expected to attend.
- At the tone, each book and pencil was put away.

(Note: The word "and" acts as a + sign; it adds two or more items. One item + one item become plural. Thus, two subjects joined by *and* create a plural relationship and require a plural verb. BUT please note the exceptions above. See Rule 13.)

RULE 7:

When subjects are joined by *or* or *nor*, the verb agrees with the nearer subject.

Examples:

- The boys or the girls enjoy ice cream.
- The dogs or the cat sleeps on the porch.
- The bird or the bees are flying in the yard.

(Note: To solve subject/verb agreement problems in sentences of this type, place your finger over the "or/nor" and all the words which precede them. This will leave visible the subject with which the verb must agree.)

- *the girls enjoy . . .*
- *the cat sleeps . . .*
- *the bees are . . .*

RULE 8:

When subjects follow their verbs (usually in questions) or when a sentence begins with *here* or *there*, be careful to find the subject and see that the verb agrees with it.

Examples:

- What are you doing today? (correct)
- What is you doing today? (incorrect) (You would never say "you is," would you? Of course not!)
- Here are the books.
- Here's the books. (incorrect) (Here is)

(Note: *Here* and *there* can never be the subject of a sentence. When you find a *here's* or a *there's* construction, abolish the apostrophe and make the contraction become two words—*here is* or *there is*. The verb will be easily seen. Also, if a question is asked, and you must find subject/verb, just answer the question. Ex: Where were the boys? [The boys were there.]

RULE 9:

Collective nouns may be either singular or plural. If members of a group are working as one unit, the collective noun is considered to be singular and requires a singular verb. If members of group are working as individuals, the collective noun is considered plural and requires a plural verb.

Examples:

- The team wins all of its games. (Singular)
- The team throw their hats in the air after each win. (Plural) (The construction is awkward, but it is correct.)
- The crew wins its games for the glory of England. (Singular)
- The crew are sure they will each win a medal. (Plural) (Think members)

Other Collective Nouns:

army crowd public audience flock swarm class
troop club herd committee orchestra group

RULE 10:

Time, money, measurement, weight, volume, and fractions are usually singular when the amount is considered a unit.

Examples:

- One fourth of the cake has been eaten.
- Three dollars is not enough to buy the skates.
- **BUT**, Three dollar bills are in my pocket.
- In the morning, 10:00 A.M. is my best time of the day.

RULE 11:

Titles of books and names of organizations or countries, regardless of their singular or plural forms, usually take singular verbs.

Examples:

- The Foster Parents Association is offering a course on infant care.
- *Gulliver's Travels* continues to be read today, many years after its first publication.

RULE 12:

Some nouns may look and sound plural (they end in -s), but they take singular verbs.

Examples: civics economics mathematics mumps physics measles

Some take plural verbs:

Examples: acoustics athletics scissors gymnastics tactics trousers

Note: the word *politics* may be either singular or plural.

RULE 13:

Every or many a before a noun or a series of nouns takes a singular verb.

Examples:

- Every one of the books is a best-seller.
- Every boy and girl in the class understands the questions on the exam.
- Many a teacher feels she deserves a pay raise.

RULE 14:

Verbs in clauses that follow the phrase *one of those* are always plural. Look at the examples below. Now, which previous Rule does this remind you of?

Examples:

- Sarah is one of those people who practice the art of humanism.
 - *one of those . . . practice*
- The daffodil is one of those flowers that bloom early in the spring.
 - *one of those . . . bloom*

RULE 15:

The word *number* is plural when preceded by *a*; it is considered singular when preceded by *the*.

Examples:

- A number of people are at the game.
 - *A number . . . are*
- The number of people in the stadium is enormous.
 - *The number . . . is*

FYI: The pronouns *THIS* and *THAT* are singular; *THESE* and *THOSE* are plural.